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SUBJECT: GOVERNOR RESHUFFLE -- SOME REWARDS FOR TRT SUPPORTERS

11. (SBU) Summary: Earlier this month, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra approved changes for 47 of Thailand's 75 Governor positions, which is among the highest number of Governor posting changes on record for a single year. The reshuffle is an annual event. Though the Governors are in essence bureaucrats, political considerations, not surprisingly, appear to play an important role in appointments and transfers to these powerful positions. End Summary.

SYSTEM ALLOWS WITHIN-TERM CHANGES

12. (SBU) Thailand's 75 Governors are appointed to their positions by the Minister of the Interior. A Governor's term is nominally 4 years for all but the three southern-most provinces, where terms are limited to just one year. Governors can, and often are, replaced before their full term is up - this is especially true in provinces of economic significance such as Chiang Mai and Phuket. The Ministry of the Interior normally recommends changes once a year, and will normally reshuffle about 20-25 Governors during each reshuffle. The 47 appointments and transfers announced this latest round represent a significant increase. The changes have to be approved by the Prime Minister's Cabinet before they become effective.

CHIEF FEDERAL POWER FAR FROM BANGKOK

13. (SBU) The Governorship is a powerful position. The Governor has been invested with more extensive powers under the "CEO Governors" initiative. Under this policy, governors set budget levels for their provinces and oversee their implementation. Governors are also empowered to determine the direction and priorities of provincial development programs and to transfer officers of any ministry working in their provinces at Director rank or below (except for police and military personnel). The government wants governors who oversee implement its programs to be willing supporters of TRT policies -- this means that those considered "reliable" are being switched to higher profile provinces while those with suspect loyalties may be shunted to less visible posts.

OFFICIAL QUALIFICATIONS

14. (SBU) It's not all political connections however. All candidates for Governor need to meet certain public service requirements before they can be nominated as a Governor. The main requirement under the Civil Service Commission's regulation is to hold the civil service rank of C-10 (the highest rank possible is C-11). For educational requirements governor candidates must hold at minimum a Bachelors degree. Officials rising through the Ministry of the Interior must complete the district chief course and an administration course for senior level officials. A candidate for Governor must also have work experience as a district chief and a deputy governor, and must have completed all the courses required for these two positions.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

15. (SBU) Most appointees are also graduates of Thailand's two most prestigious universities, Chulalonghorn University and Thammasat University. These schools have long been producers of Thailand's political and administrative elite. Chulalonghorn's graduates, known as the "Singha Dam," and Thammasat's graduates, known as the "Singha Daeng," have long been rivals for dominance within the Ministry of the Interior. The MOI is currently dominated by the Singha Daeng, whose members include Deputy Minister of the Interior Sermsak Phongphanit, and Interior Permanent Secretary Sucharit Patchimmanan. Embassy sources tell us that many of the governors promoted to their new position are believed to be members of the Singha Daeng.

16. (SBU) Some of the transfers appeared to be rewards for TRT supporters -- Anuwat Methiwiboonwut, for example, was transferred from Phang-na to the larger province of Samut Songkhram. Another TRT supporter, Anand Phromnart, was reassigned from Krabi province to the larger Chachoengsao province. Both had been in their previous posts for about a year before being moved up. Other transfers could have been demotions for suspect loyalties. For example, Kamon

Jitrawang, former governor of Ang-Thong, was moved to a position of much lower prestige because of his close relationship with an opposition party leader, Mr. Banharn Silpa-Archa of the Chart Thai party. In another case, former Governor of Nakhon Ratchasima, Phongphayom Wasphuti, is believed by some observers here to have been transferred to an inactive post because he directed critical comments in the past at TRT government.

17. (SBU) Comment. The unusual twist to this year's reshuffle of Governors is the rate of turnover. While Thaksin supporters will claim that there is nothing abnormal in promoting career public servants who are motivated to implement government policies, Thaksin opponents will chide this year's reshuffle as further evidence of Thaksin's drive to dominate the governmental landscape. End Comment.
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